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SUBJECT: PRT TIKRIT: SAMARRA'S LOCAL POLITICS, DFI AND MOSQUE RECONSTRUCTION KEY ISSUES

Classified By: PRT LEADER Stephanie Miley, for reasons 1.4 b and d.

¶1. (U) This is a PRT Tikrit, Salah ad Din cable.

¶2. (C) SUMMARY. Local political rivalries in Samarra threaten stability as tensions mount with the reconstruction of the Golden Dome Mosque (reftel). Samarra's city officials, who are holdovers from Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) days or were elected through ambiguous tribal means, are not representative and are not respected by city residents. The defunct city council does not meet, and its President (CCP), Asad Ali Yassin al Abasi, actively undermines the city's Mayor, Mahmoud Khalaf Ahmed al Bazi. Meanwhile, the Mayor has taken a more active role in representing the city's interests with the Golden Dome Mosque's reconstruction and in pursuing long promised Development Fund for Iraq (DFI) monies. Fighting between the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and terrorists, the city remains laden with terrorists is constant. Al Qaeda's (AQIZ) Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) exerts some influence in the area. As reconstruction of the Golden Dome Mosque focuses more attention on the city, obtaining the promised Development Fund for Iraq (DFI) monies, a will likely help assuage some tensions among the city's residents. Bio notes in paras 13 and 14. END SUMMARY.

City Leaders Not Representative

¶3. (C) None of the city's officials has a strong mandate to hold his position. Many of them are holdover appointments from the CPA or were put in office through ambiguous tribal proceedings. Samarra's boycott of the 2005 elections resulted in the city having no representation at the provincial level. The informal local sheikhs' council reportedly "elected" Asad Ali Yassin al Abasi, a Saddam-exiled Samarra native with strong political ties in Baghdad, as the City Council President (CCP) in January 2006. A staff member for the former Mayor, Mahmoud Khalaf Ahmed al Bazi became Samarra's Mayor through unknown means in early 2005, after insurgents killed his predecessor. The city council does not meet, and there is not a functional court in the city. Of late, the Mayor's office has become more active in the city's management.

¶4. (C) In the heavily tribal city of Samarra, neither the CCP nor the Mayor enjoys support outside of his respective tribe.

Though all are Sunni Arab, the city's tribes combat and undermine each other's interests.

Dynamics between the CCP and the Mayor

¶5. (C) CF relations with the CCP soured over a disagreement about the purchase of the CCP's downtown Samarra home for use as a police station. In early January 2007, a car bombing

destroyed half of the house. Due to the circumstances surrounding the incident, it is possible that the CCP may have orchestrated the bombing in an attempt to obtain compensation for the damages. CF relations with the Mayor, however, have been improving because of his active engagement on bettering the city's municipal services. Although the CCP was initially the lead on Development Fund for Iraq projects, the Mayor has recently become more active due to the CCP's continual absence from the city.

¶6. (C) From opposing tribes, the Mayor and the CCP have long been at odds. The CCP openly states that he believes the Mayor is associated with anti-Iraq forces (AIF) because the Mayor has not received as many threats or attempts on his life. Recently, the Mayor and the CCP have become more suspicious of each other and will not speak in meetings where the other is present.

Reconstructing the Golden Dome Mosque

¶7. (C) One year after its February 22, 2006 bombing, the Golden Dome Mosque (AKA Ali al Hadi Shrine, al Askariya Shrine) remains in ruins. Reconstruction, under the auspices of a GOI committee and the UNESCO (reftel), is slated to begin on April 18. Initially, Mayor Mahmoud took the lead on the mosque's reconstruction, attending conferences and meetings in Baghdad and Amman. With the recent publicity, the CCP has attempted (with little success) to become the city's sole interlocutor on the project, using his GOI contacts for invitations to the discussions.

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¶8. (C) After recent meetings with UNESCO and the GOI reconstruction committee, the Mayor began working to garner support among Samarra residents for the project. According to the Mayor, Abdel Aziz al Hakem has agreed to back revitalization of the marketplace around the mosque and to construct a school, medical clinic, and smaller mosque as part of the larger Golden Dome Mosque reconstruction project.

The Mayor has also been working on security provisions with the Ministry of Interior representative and Samarra native General Adnan Thabit, who is charged of security during the reconstruction. General Adnan has reportedly said that he plans to bolster security forces throughout the city. The Mayor also says that while in Amman he opened discussions with UNDP to secure funding for essential services in the city.

DFI Update

¶9. (C) Working with Samarra's governance structures, the PRT has been assisting the city in obtaining its Development Fund for Iraq (DFI) monies, as a method of developing a functional relationship between the Samarra city government and the provincial government as well as between the provincial government and the central government. Through the extensive DFI process, which required claim submissions from over 1,000 of the city's residents, many have become expectant of the promised compensation money. Continual delays in receipt of the funding is eroding the city leaders' already tenuous mandate, thus reducing their ability to affect change in the city. Additionally, the DFI holdups are exacerbating the city's tensions with the central government, which most residents see as Shia-dominated and revenge-seeking for the bombing of the Golden Dome Mosque, a Shia shrine.

¶10. (C) Samarra's total DFI package is USD 25 million. It will be used in three sectors: USD 10 million for compensation monies for battle damage with oversight from the Ministry of Water Resources, USD 11 million for

reconstruction projects with oversight from the Ministry of Public Works, and USD 4 million for electrical grid refurbishment with oversight from the Ministry of Electricity.

¶11. (C) At present, the compensation funds of USD 10 million are in an account at the Ministry of Water Resources. Before distribution of the compensation monies can begin, the Ministry of Water Resources must make the final approval and transfer the funds from Baghdad to Tikrit. The Ministry of Electricity is in the final stages of approving contracts to complete the electrical grid refurbishment; the Ministry has set up accounts, but is still waiting for the funds to be transferred. The Ministry of Public Works has released USD 600,000 and will begin projects over the coming months. However, significant follow-up is still required to ensure that the DFI funding makes it to the people of Samarra.

Security Issues

¶12. (C) In June 2006, the CF considered Samarra a model example of reclaiming a small city from AIF control. Attacks were diminished to tribal disputes and CF handed security over to the ISF. Atmospheric reporting suggested confidence was growing in ISF. However, through strategic targeting, AQIZ used tribal rifts to destabilize the security situation.

By August 2006, the ISF's new found confidence was diminished, and intimidation and attacks took the ISF off the streets. With the further exacerbation of tribal tensions, some tribes began aligning themselves with AQIZ. Fighting continues between the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and terrorists, and the city remains laden with AIF. Al Qaeda's (AQIZ) Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) exerts some influence in the area. According to CF atmospherics reporting, ISI has forced several outlying villages to implement Sharia customs, such as requiring women to be veiled and banning smoking in public. Other reporting continues to indicate AQIZ presence and operations around the city.

Comment

¶13. (C) Ensuring near-term disbursement of DFI funds, especially the compensation payments, will likely help assuage some tensions among Samarra's residents and add a measure of legitimacy to the city's leadership. By demonstrating that the GOI is interested in Sunni concerns in

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Samarra and will deliver on its promises, it will also assist in combating AQIZ's attempts to undermine the GOI and to strengthen the Islamic State of Iraq's (ISI) influence around the city. The task of rebuilding the Golden Dome Mosque, however, remains contentious. Without coordination from the city's leaders, its reconstruction has the potential to be divisive in the city. Additionally, given the mosque's symbolic importance and the public interest throughout Iraq, a smooth reconstruction process will be important for reconciliation efforts. END COMMENT.
KHALILZAD